



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on Belarusian Parliamentary Elections and Referendum**

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
October 21, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States feels compelled to express its dismay with the systematic, egregious violations of numerous OSCE commitments in the lead up to and during the October 17 parliamentary elections and referendum on abolishing presidential term limits in Belarus.

In the 1990 Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension, the participating States declared that "the will of the people, freely and fairly expressed through periodic and genuine elections, is the basis of the authority and legitimacy of all government."

Yet, the OSCE International Election Observation Mission concluded, and I quote again here that "the Belarusian authorities failed to ensure the fundamental conditions necessary for the will of the people to serve as a basis for authority of government." What a remarkable indictment.

In light of the damning reports from the OSCE International Election Observation Mission, of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and of independent domestic and international NGOs about the intimidating electoral environment, the deficient and abusively implemented legal electoral framework and misconduct during actual voting and vote counting, the Government of Belarus has called into question its own democratic authority and legitimacy and that of its constitution.

Moreover, the post-election beating, arrest, and/or detainment of journalists, opposition leaders and other peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators, as well as the refusal of Belarusian authorities to broadcast news of the demonstrations, directly flouts the spirit and commitments of the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman, this Delegation has been frequently accused by our Belarusian colleagues of prejudging events in Belarus, but, sadly, the events leading up to and on October 17 prove that many concerns raised by the U.S. and other delegations over the past year were completely well-founded and have unfortunately come to pass.

The OSCE/ODIHR and OSCE Parliamentary Assembly preliminary conclusions on the October 17 voting in Belarus speak for themselves. There is no need to recite the litany of violations of OSCE commitments found in those conclusions.

The United States commends the OSCE International Election Observation Mission for standing by its tested methodology and OSCE principles by providing an unvarnished assessment of electoral-related events in Belarus on and before October 17, despite the unprecedented and inappropriate pressure directed at the observation mission by its Belarusian hosts.

Indeed, the deliberate obstruction of OSCE observers by Belarusian authorities recounted in the preliminary conclusions was again, gravely disappointing.

The United States supports and respects the Belarusian people, their sovereignty and their right to democratically decide their future. And we call on the Belarusian Government to recommit itself to its OSCE commitments and the ideals of the Helsinki process so that the people of Belarus have the real ability to decide their own future.

Thank you.